



CITY COUNCIL

Public Safety Committee

**Monday, March 2, 2009
5:00 p.m.**

Attendance: D. Sterner, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou

Other City Staff Attending: T. Butler, S. Katzenmoyer, J. Hassel, J. Giardiello, C. Heminitz, W. Heim

Dennis Sterner, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:43 p.m.

I. Handicapped Parking

Ms. Butler stated that this resolution states that a PA handicapped license or placard is needed before an application can be considered. It also requires a severe disability and the applicant's physician to complete a portion of the application. She stated that the application is based on Allentown's application. She stated that Ms. Katzenmoyer adapted it to Reading.

Dr. Hassel reported that medicine has many grey areas. He stated that asking the physicians to be specific may be difficult as they try to please their patients. He stated his belief that the privilege is abused but that he tries to approve only those applicants who are truly in need. He stated the ease in obtaining a State handicapped license or placard causes people to think they qualify for their own parking space. He stated the criteria set by Allentown are reasonable and he would be willing to use these guidelines. He stated he reviews each application. He stated his belief that rental units and multiple cars per family have exacerbated the City's parking problems.

Mr. Sterner stated his belief that an unlimited number of spaces is bothersome and further stated his belief that the number of applications will severely increase after this resolution is passed. Ms. Butler stated that she has contacted Harrisburg and Allentown. They did not report an increase in applications after removing their limit on the number of spaces.

Mr. Sterner stated his position that he would approve of this resolution if a consistent process is followed. Dr. Hassel stated that the application limits those who qualify. He also stated that the applicant is not guaranteed this space but that anyone with a PA handicapped license or placard can use it. He suggested that this be implemented then reviewed after it has been in place for one year.

Mr. Giardiello stated that many applications he receives do not reach Dr. Hassel as they do not qualify.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that this is a good solution. She stated the need to educate the citizens and have further discussions on parking in general.

Mr. Marmarou stated that he was told that if he applied for a handicapped license or placard he would receive it as he is a disabled veteran. Dr. Hassel stated that that would be correct for the State but that locally he would need to show why he is hindered and needs a handicapped parking space. He stated his practice of reporting some applicants to the State Department of Transportation because, in his opinion, they should not be driving and licenses have been revoked.

Mr. Sterner questioned if Dr. Hassel had any other suggestions to add to the application. Dr. Hassel stated this is very well written and had no further suggestions.

Ms. Butler stated her belief that this resolution is a good compromise.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the application must state clearly that there is no ownership of the parking space.

Ms. Butler questioned the renewal process. Mr. Giardiello stated that he would continue monitoring the renewals. He stated that he and Dr. Hassel currently work together on renewals and that process would remain the same.

Mr. Sterner requested this resolution be discussed at the next Committee of the Whole meeting before being placed on the regular agenda for formal action.

II. Public Safety at Schools

Officers at RHS Update

Chief Heim stated that the District has agreed to pay 100% of the cost for two officers to be inside Reading High School. He stated that these placements will be made as soon as possible.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned who would define these officer's responsibilities. Chief Heim stated that he would. He stated that a job description has been drafted and that the officers will be performing preventative patrols inside the building.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the perception the well behaved students have of the police presence. Mr. Sterner stated that the principal should address this issue.

Mr. Marmarou stated he witnessed several incidents when RHS security staff needed to address issues. He stated that he was impressed with their actions.

Chief Heim stated that after this school year a long-term contract for in school officers would need to be signed. He stated that the District will need to decide what they want and their degree of willingness to share costs.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if the relocation of these officers would require the hiring of additional officers. Chief Heim noted that it would. He stated that he will not pull officers off the streets to staff the schools and not replace them.

Use of School Resource Officers at Middle Schools

Chief Heim stated that currently one officer rotates to all four middle schools. He stated that the issues are the same as at the high school but that there are fewer students in each school.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if the resource officer works with the peer mediation program. Chief Heim stated that he does not at this time but has in the past.

Daytime Curfew Enforcement Report

Chief Heim stated that the enforcement centers around the high school. He stated that youths who do not belong in the area are there all day long. He stated that special details are run occasionally.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the amended ordinance was helpful. Chief Heim stated that it definitely was and that hundreds of citations have been issued.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the next step after the citation. Chief Heim stated that it goes into the Magisterial District Justice system for fines and court costs.

Mr. Sterner questioned if parents are also responsible and held accountable. Chief Heim stated that parents are cited for repeat offenders.

Public Safety Juniors Program at Southern Middle School

Chief Heim stated that this is a good program. He stated that there are approximately 30 students who participate regularly. He stated that police and fire are involved along with Joe Ayala, who conducts calisthenics with the youths.

Mr. Marmarou questioned if the department was involved in Camp Cadet. Chief Heim stated that several officers are at the camp for an entire week.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the Administration at Southern was supportive. Chief Heim stated that they are very involved and very helpful.

Mr. Sterner questioned if this program would be planned for the other middle schools. Chief Heim stated that this is a pilot program and is disappointed at the low number of youths involved.

III. Graffiti

Ms. Heminitz reviewed a report showing the work of the Graffiti Task Force and the progress made in removing graffiti.

Mr. Sterner questioned when there would be an increase in removal. Ms. Heminitz stated that removal would begin when the weather becomes warm enough.

Mr. Waltman stated his belief that the youth need to become involved in this issue. He stated that the City cannot clean its way or police its way out of this issue. He stated that the youth need to be empowered with involvement.

Mr. Waltman stated his belief that much graffiti is gang related. He stated the need to break down the barriers between people and encourage interaction. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this is a focus of the Gang Task Force.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that when murals are painted in areas, that area sees a decrease in graffiti. She stated that increasing the murals would decrease graffiti as the youths involved in the mural project feel ownership.

Mr. Sterner questioned who was leading this effort. Ms. Heminitz stated that the Task Force is addressing these issues.

Ms. Heminitz stated that the graffiti logs will now be posted on the City's website.

IV. Dominican Parade

Mr. Sterner questioned who requested the parade permit. Chief Heim stated that it was a community group.

Mr. Sterner questioned if they were paying for the security presence. Chief Heim stated that there were ten City police officers on overtime duty. These officers will be paid by the community group. He is unsure if they will be paying for the State police or Sheriff's office presence.

Mr. Marmarou noted the willingness of the sheriffs to assist the City, increasing their visibility to the community.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if the same amount of security would have been provided if the problems of last year had not occurred. Chief Heim stated that it would have as he had reports that other groups would be attending with the intent of interfering. He stated that approximately 50 people attended and were taunting the group during the event.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the school district was involved in the event. Chief Heim stated that it was not involved. He stated that students participated only with parental permission.

Mr. Sterner questioned how long N. 13th Street was closed. Chief Heim stated that it remained closed under after the high school dismissal.

Mr. Sterner noted the problems caused to traffic flow. Ms. Katzenmoyer questioned parents having access to 13th & Green elementary school to get their children home. Chief Heim stated that parents were granted access to the school.

The Public Safety Committee meeting adjourned at 6:37 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Katzenmoyer, Deputy City Clerk*